SEDAR Constituent Representative and General Observer Guidelines

SEDAR Overview

SEDAR is intended to provide thorough and robust benchmark stock assessments based on the most recent, best available, and scientifically sound data. Terms of Reference (ToRs) guide the process and are drafted for each assessment. SEDAR coordinates two categories of assessments; 'benchmark assessments' and 'standard assessments'.

- Benchmark assessments are required for initial SEDAR assessments, and may be conducted for subsequent assessments to incorporate new data, apply alternative models, or address other issues that arise. SEDAR benchmark assessments evaluate all known data sources, review all input data, consider practicable modeling approaches, and evaluate all past assessment decisions.

- Standard assessments are only conducted on species for which an approved benchmark assessment exists. Modifications to the data inputs used in the previous assessment may be discussed if new information exists. The Terms of Reference approved for the standard assessment will guide the data available for discussion and model that will be developed.

SEDAR is a management-oriented process. Assessments and related products are requested to address important management needs that often must be addressed within rigid and pre-determined deadlines. Therefore, issues may be raised that cannot be addressed given the time and information available for a particular SEDAR assessment project. In such instances, assessment models will often consider various scenarios addressing the uncertainties, and research recommendations can be provided to gather information for consideration in future assessments.

SEDAR Process

A SEDAR benchmark assessment is organized around three workshops.

- Data Workshop, during which fisheries, monitoring, and life history data are reviewed and compiled.

- Assessment process, which is conducted via a workshop and webinars, during which assessment models are developed and population parameters are estimated using the information provided from the Data Workshop.

- Review Workshop, during which independent experts review the input data, assessment methods, and assessment products.

A standard assessment is intended to be completed in a shorter time window than a benchmark and combines the data and assessment workshops into one step. Despite this difference, the same general guidelines apply to observers of the standard assessment process.

Participants
The Councils and NOAA Fisheries appoint individuals to serve as panelists for each SEDAR project stage, for both benchmark and standard assessments. These appointed panelists are responsible for fulfilling the TORS for the project and documenting their efforts in the SEDAR assessment reports. Further, because SEDAR is a Council process, all meetings and workshops are open to the general public. Any member of the public who attends a workshop or webinar will be listed as an Observer in the official record.

In addition to the appointed panelists, Councils may appoint Council or constituent members to observe the proceedings. Information presented in SEDAR workshops is made available to these representatives. However, due to the need for agencies and authors to apply quality control/quality assurance standards to documents and data, some documentation or datasets may not be available to constituent representatives until a workshop is concluded. Similarly due to legal obligations to prevent dissemination of confidential information, some sources of information may not be eligible for distribution at all. Accordingly, some confidential data are withheld from SEDAR workshop panelists who lack appropriate clearance.

Documentation
The primary types of documentation considered during the SEDAR assessment process include reference documents, working papers, datasets, and workshop reports.
- Reference documents refer to published materials that provide background for the assessment. These documents are typically published in some way and provided in advance to panelists and others without restriction.
- Working papers are documents prepared for a particular workshop or assessment project, providing details needed for review of datasets or analyses. Preliminary or draft working papers will be identified as such, with language included on a cover page providing the date, submitter or author, and statement that the information is pre-decisional. Subsequent revisions should include the date of the revision and retain the original submission date. Working papers will be made final following the assessment stage for which they were provided, upon submission of a final version by the authors.
- Many datasets are considered during the assessment process, involving specialized software programs for access and often containing confidential information. These datasets are not publicly disseminated through SEDAR, although assessment input data extracted from them is made available through its documentation in the assessment workshop report.
- Workshop reports are prepared by each panel. Final reports are made available following the workshop, with timing dictated by the nature of the project and progress made at the workshop.

Distribution
- As SEDAR is a 'paperless' process, paper copies of documents are not available at workshops and not regularly distributed. The SEDAR website (www.sefsc.noaa.gov/sedar/) serves as the primary mode of distribution for all publicly disseminated workshop information. Posting dates to the website are determined by the type of document, as described in the 'Documentation' section, and the rate of progress for the preparers, which is often beyond SEDAR control.

- Observers may request draft copies of working papers that have been distributed to a workshop panel and appointed constituent representatives by contacting the SEDAR Coordinator for the project. A record will be kept of all individuals requesting draft documentation so that final documentation can be provided, if revision or correction is necessary.
- Draft SEDAR workshop reports are not distributed beyond the workshop panel. Upon approval by a workshop panel, workshop reports are posted to the SEDAR website.

Written Comment
- At any stage in the SEDAR process, written public comment may be submitted according to the lead Cooperator's procedures. Comments submitted in this manner will be made available to panel members and become part of the overall record of the assessment. Written comments should not be given to panelists directly; they must come through the Cooperator and be recorded in the administrative record.

Data Access and Requests
- SEDAR is not an intermediary in the data dissemination process for any state, federal or other data source. SEDAR is not an intermediary in the supervisory, task assignment, or workload management procedures of any state or federal agency or other associated entity. Appointment to, or presence at, a SEDAR workshop does not enable any individual to circumvent any agencies' procedures or policies governing data dissemination and employee tasking.
- SEDAR works with many data providers, all of which have policies and procedures governing data access and distribution. Representatives of these agencies are appointed to SEDAR workshop panels to provide and summarize data for consideration. Requests for data must be directed to the agency holding the desired data following that agency's data provision guidelines. Those desiring access to particular data sources are responsible for contacting the data provider directly to determine the appropriate procedure for requesting access or information.
- The analyses investigated for a workshop are primarily determined by the Terms of Reference. A workshop panel may request of its membership additional data evaluations, presentations, and analyses deemed necessary to meet the Terms of Reference, with consideration given to availability of information and resources. Such requests are vetted through the workshop panel and documented in the workshop report or other SEDAR supporting documents as appropriate. Analytical requests, above and beyond those supported by a workshop panel and documented in SEDAR workshop reports and tasks memos, must be requested in accordance with the appropriate agency policies.

Specific Guidance for each Workshop

Data workshop
The SEDAR Data Workshop consists of Workgroup and Plenary sessions. SEDAR data working groups are assigned particular data components (e.g., life history, commercial statistics, recreational statistics, and indices). Working groups operate fairly informally. Working groups are responsible for reviewing data and working papers and developing recommendations for consideration by the

full workshop panel (Plenary). All data recommendations are made by the full appointed panel in plenary sessions.

Constituent representatives and general observers are welcome in the working groups and may contribute to discussions at the discretion of the workgroup chair. They are welcome to observe the plenary, but do not contribute to consensus building at plenary sessions and may be called on to answer questions or recognized to comment during plenary sessions at the discretion of the workshop chair.

Assessment workshop
The Assessment Workshop is held via an in-person meeting and webinars. Constituent representatives and general observers at the assessment workshop are not part of consensus building. The workshop Chair can recognize such individuals for comments or to assist in answering panelist questions at a time deemed most appropriate by the Chair.

Review workshop
Constituent representatives and general observers at the review workshop are not a part of consensus building. Non-panelist comments will not be taken during the Review Workshop. At the discretion of the Chair, constituent representatives or observers may be recognized to assist in answering Review Panel questions.

General Guidelines

SEDAR workshop panel decisions are based on science
Discussions and deliberations shall not consider possible management actions, agency financial concerns, or social and economic consequences.

SEDAR workshop decisions are based on consensus
There is no formal voting in SEDAR. Panels are expected to reach conclusions that all appointed participants can accept. For SEDAR purposes, consensus is taken to mean that all workshop panelists consent to the range and treatment of recommendations included in the report. Minority reports are allowed only at the review workshop, and only as a last resort. Data and assessment workshops should recommend a range of alternative solutions to be explored whenever a single clear consensus is not achievable.

Personal attacks are not tolerated
Advancement in science is based on disagreement and healthy, spirited discourse is encouraged. However, professionalism must be upheld and those who descend into personal attacks will be asked to leave. Those criticizing the work and recommendations of others are expected to do so constructively and to offer reasonable solutions to go along with any criticisms.

Agendas provided for SEDAR workshops are approximate
Published starting and ending times for the Workshop will be adhered to so that participants may make appropriate travel plans, but starting and ending times of daily workshop sessions will be dictated by progress toward assigned tasks. Certain deadlines must be met during the workshop to

ensure that all decisions are made and the group has a chance to review draft documentation, thus extended work days and evening working sessions may be required.

Materials Distribution
SEDAR workshops are 'paperless' to the extent possible. Assessment documentation and information is distributed through the SEDAR website. Paper copies of the agenda and Terms of Reference will be provided at the workshop.

Confidentiality
SEDAR is a Council process and therefore it is an open and public process. In a case where confidential data must be discussed and there is no sufficient way to mask the data, the workgroup leader may request all observers and participants who do not have confidential data clearance to briefly leave the room. It is the intent that such occasions would be infrequent and brief. The nature of the discussion and the panel recommendation will be presented at plenary in a manner that retains the confidentiality of the data.

Administrative Record and Public Comment
SEDAR is a public Council process and all SEDAR webinars and workshops are open to the public. All submitted documents and official correspondence become part of the official administrative record. All SEDAR workshops and webinars are announced in the Federal Register. All workshop discussion sessions are recorded. All working papers and final documents will be publicly posted on the SEDAR website once completed. The names and affiliations of all workshop participants and observers will be listed in the workshop reports.

Meeting Attendance and Sign-in Forms
All attendees are expected to identify themselves at each workshop and webinar. Sign in forms will be posted in the meeting space during each day of the workshop. Everyone is expected to sign in each day that they attend.